

# THE PINNACLE OF BEAUTY



On the Lightening of Abū Lahab's  
Punishment each Monday



*Tāj al-Shari‘a*

*Sheikh Muḥammad Akhtar Riḍā al-Qādirī*

Translated by Abdul Aziz Suraqah



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FOREWORD BY SHEIKH MUHAMMAD  
ASJAD RIDĀ KHĀN

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, the Compassionate, the Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah, the lord of the worlds, and may prayers and salutations be upon our master Muḥammad, and upon his Family and Companions.

It is indeed pleasing to learn that Ihsanica Media has completed the translation of *Nihāya al-zayn*, which is a short work by my beloved and noble father, our master Sheikh Muḥammad Akhtar Ridā Khān. I pray that this work finds acceptance in the Divine Court of Allah Most High. I would like to extend my appreciation to my dear brothers in the love of the beloved and sacred Messenger of Allah ﷺ, Muhammad Junayd, Shiraz Abdul Majid, Tariq Hasan Khan, Jawid al-Hindi, Uthman Yousaf, Irfan Edhi, Shaukat Malida, Shabir Bakali, Salim Vindhani, Balal Hassan Ali, Tahseen Hussain, Muhammad Umar Faruq and Faisal Noori, for putting this publication together, and especially Ustadh Abdul Aziz Suraqah for his valuable and pleasing translation.

Sheikh Muḥammad Asjad Ridā Khān  
Raīs al-Jāmi‘a,  
Jāmi‘a al-Ridā, Bareilly



## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

WHEN HANDLING COMPLEX issues in the sacred sciences of Islam, a student or scholar must possess two essential features: a passionate love for Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and a sharp analytical mind capable of penetrating to the root of matters and drawing from a wide array of disciplines. One without the other will lead inevitably to erroneous and dangerous conclusions. Strong religious emotions, when not tempered by scholastic aptitude, will usually lead to folly, since a lover's feelings alone cannot determine the ruling of Allah and His Messenger in a given issue. And scholastic aptitude, when not rendered soft by love and devotion, and made malleable by sincerity, will lead to dry and lifeless rulings that alienate the common Muslim and provide fodder for pharisaical hair-splitting *Ahl al-Rusūm* (those obsessed with the outward of the law at the expense of the inward). Gathering between the two is perfection.

This small but detailed work by Tāj al-Shari‘a Muḥammad Akhtar Rida Khān, scion of the great reviver (*Mujaddid*) Imam Aḥmad Rida Khān, addresses the famous narration of Thuwayba, a slave whom Abū Lahab freed out of joy for the Prophet’s birth ﷺ, and the narrations that detail the lightening of punishment that Abū Lahab received on account of that, and tackles an assortment of objections made to these narrations, which in essence limit the Prophet’s mercy and intercession. The central thesis of this treatise is that the Prophet’s ﷺ power of intercession encompasses non-believers; but not in the sense of general amnesty from Hell, rather because of the lightening of the punishment of lengthy standing to be suffered on the Last Day.

Other areas of discussion in this work include: the use of dreams as legal proofs, whether non-believers receive recompense for their good deeds in the Hereafter, whether non-believers can receive benefit in their graves, the forms of intercession held by the Prophet ﷺ, the reconciliation of proof texts that seemingly contradict one another, and how *mursal* (hanging) hadith reports are acceptable for use according to the principles of the Hanafi school.

*If this disbeliever who was condemned  
And whose hands were bound forever in the Fire  
Mentioned that every Monday  
His punishment is lightened due to his joy in Ahmad  
What say you of the servant  
Whose entire life is joyful with Ahmad*

JUNAID YĀSĪN  
PUBLISHER



## INTRODUCTION

DURING MY VISIT TO Medina the Illumined on Dhū al-Hijja 18, 1431/November 28, 2010, I was asked about the claims of those who object to the hadith of Thuwayba, the Prophet's ﷺ wet-nurse whom Abū Lahab joyfully manumitted upon receiving news of the Prophet's birth ﷺ. It is stated in a hadith that Abū Lahab's punishment is eased for him on Mondays because of his action on that day. This hadith, the objectors claim, contravenes the Quran and consensus, and is therefore spurious [*mawdū‘*]. I gave a basic and preliminary answer that day and argued that the hadith has a basis and was met with acceptance, and that the Quranic verses and consensus are not taken in an absolute fashion.

There are other hadith reports mentioning some of the disbelievers, or a group of them, receiving a lightened punishment, and that will be part of the general lightening that all people—believer and disbeliever alike—will experience at the plains [on the Day of Judgment] due to the Prophet's intercession ﷺ. Now, in order to reconcile the various proof texts and eliminate contradiction, all of these hadith reports are deemed specific exceptions to the general and absolute texts. The source for understanding the meanings of the Book [the Quran] goes back to the eloquent words of the Prophet ﷺ. Allah Most High says, ﴿And likewise, We have revealed unto you the Reminder, that you may explain to the people what is revealed to them﴾ [16:44]. The unrestricted [*muṭlaq*] in the Quran is what the Sunna proves to be unrestricted in all areas, and what the Sunna deems subject to qualification is clarified in its textual implications [*dilāla*]. It is not as some think,

that everything that appears unrestricted at face value is taken as such; rather, in these matters one must take recourse in the explanation set forth by the Prophet ﷺ, for his guidance is the true guidance.

During my stay in Medina I came across a nameless book that quoted a statement from Sheikh [Jamil] al-Husaynī—may Allah preserve him—that seemed to support the view of the objector. This statement made me even stronger in my certainty that my view was correct. So after I returned to my homeland I was able to look into this matter further. I reviewed the books of hadith and it became clear to me that my opinion was not without precedent—so may Allah be praised for what he bestows and inspires. In this treatise I shall present the hadith in question, complete with its chains of narration, and I shall detail where it is found in the collections of al-Bukhārī, al-Bayhaqī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, and others.



**I**MAM AL-BUKHĀRĪ narrated in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*: “Al-Ḥākim b. Nāfi<sup>c</sup> reported via Shu‘ayb > al-Zuhrī > ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr > Zaynab b. Abī Salama > who reported that Umm Ḥabība b. Abī Sufyān said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, marry my sister, Bint Abī Sufyān.’ The Prophet ﷺ asked, ‘Would you like that?’ She replied, ‘I am not yours to the exclusion of all other [women (i.e., you have many wives)], and I would like for my sister to share with me in the good [i.e., in this life and the next] through you.’ ... ‘Urwa said, ‘Thuwayba was the manumitted slave of Abū Lahab. He freed her and she suckled the Prophet ﷺ. When Abū Lahab died some of his family saw him in a dream vision and asked him about what he received [in the Hereafter]. He replied, “I have not found any good after you save that I am given drink due to having set Thuwayba free, and on every Monday my punishment is lightened.”’”<sup>i</sup>

I ask the one who objects to this hadith and claims that it is a lie: What will you say regarding these masterful Imams who reported this hadith and received it with acceptance? Are you bold enough to say that they carelessly reported a lie in their collected works? And if your claim is correct, how can they, the bearers of sacred knowledge and the keepers of the sacred trust of the religion, be trusted in what they say? This is tantamount to casting aspersions upon the scholars who are the guardians of the Sacred Law. I’ll go further and say that this is an attempt to demolish the edifice of the religion. This portion of my answer is enough to answer Sheikh Jamīl’s critical questioning of the scholars who accepted this hadith.

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<sup>i</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* §5101.

This portion also demonstrates that there is no precedent [*salaf*] for the one who claims that the hadith is a lie; and if, for argument's sake, there is a precedent, let him explain who that precedent is.

I would also like to ask the objector and those who support him: What led you to make this claim? What drew you to allege that the hadith is a lie? Certainly you have a good example in the predecessors [*Salaf*]; they didn't claim that the hadith is a lie. The most they said was that it is *mursal* [a loose report]. Take the following statement from Imam Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, whom you have relied upon and quoted in your nameless book:

This hadith proves that a righteous action may benefit a disbeliever in the Hereafter. This, however, contravenes the outward purport of the Quran, where Allah Most High says, ﴿And We shall turn to what they did and they shall find it as scattered dust particles﴾ [25:23]. Firstly, it can be retorted that this report is *mursal* by way of ‘Urwa, who did not mention who narrated it to him. In the possibility that the chain is intact, the actual contents of the report are the product of a dream vision and dream visions are not considered evidence. In all likelihood, the narrator was still a non-Muslim at the time of seeing the dream, and as such it can not be used as evidence.

Secondly, even if we assume that it is accepted, the import of this hadith carries the possibility of being unique for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, as was mentioned regarding the narration of Abū Ṭālib that states his punishment was lightened and he was moved from the deepest flames to the shallowest part of Hell. Al-Bayhaqī said, “The narration mentioning the disbelievers not possessing any good is understood to mean that they will neither find an escape from the Hellfire nor will they enter Paradise. The punishment they deserve for their sins and crimes besides disbelief might be lightened for them on account of good they previously did.” As for [Qādī] ‘Iyād, he stated, “It is agreed by way of consensus that the disbelievers will not stand to benefit from their good

actions or receive their rewards through enjoyment of a delight or a lightening of punishment—even if some of them shall receive more punishment than others.”

This does not negate the possibility mentioned by al-Bayhaqī, for everything narrated on this topic relates to the sin of disbelief. What is to preclude the lightening of punishment for sins that are less than disbelief?

Compare Qādī ‘Iyād’s statement above (cited by Ibn Ḥajar) with his statement in *Ikmāl [al-mu‘lim]* mentioned before, where he answers the apparent conflict between the narration on the lightening of Abū Ṭālib’s punishment due to the Prophet’s intercession and the Quranic verses he mentioned. If you compare the two statements you will see a clear contradiction and conflict between them and the former and latter statements. As such, the consensus he cited is debatable, as we shall soon detail.

Ibn Ḥajar continued:

Al-Qurṭubī said, “This lightening is restricted to those who were explicitly mentioned in the texts.” Ibn al-Munīr said in his gloss, “There are two issues here: [First:] what is impossible, namely, to consider the obedience of a disbeliever of benefit when coupled with his disbelief—because the condition for obedience is that it is performed with a correct intention, which is lacking in the case of a disbeliever. [Second:] that the disbeliever, out of Allah’s pure generosity, can be rewarded for some good actions he performed. This is not rationally impossible. Once this is established, we see that Abū Lahab’s manumission of Thuwayba is a strong circumstantial element [*qarīna*] that is worthy of consideration. It is rationally possible for Allah to bestow His generosity upon him in any way He wills, just as He did with Abū Ṭālib. In this matter the divinely revealed texts are to be followed, both in affirmation and negation.” In supplement to this, the aforementioned generosity may be shown to the disbeliever who did a good act, and Allah knows best.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 9:119.

Elsewhere Ibn Ḥajar stated:

It appears from the hadith of al-‘Abbās that this longing was fulfilled. The Prophet’s statement ﷺ, “My intercession shall benefit him,” was deemed problematic because of the verse ﴿The intercession of the intercessors will not avail them﴾, [74:48]. It is retorted that this [hadith] is qualified, which accounts for why the scholars considered it among the unique features [*khaṣā’is*] of the Prophet ﷺ. It has also been said that the meaning of the word “benefit” in the verse is different from the meaning of the word “benefit” in the hadith. The meaning of “benefit” in the verse, it is said, is extraction from the Hellfire, and “benefit” in the hadith means lightening [of torment]. This is the view supported by al-Qurṭubī.

Now, al-Bayhaqī said in *al-Ba’th*: “The narration concerning Abū Ṭālib is authentic, so there is no justification from the standpoint of hadith authenticity to deny it. As I see it, the reason why the disbelievers cannot receive intercession is because of the truthful statement [in revelation], which declares that no one can intercede for them. This is general for every disbeliever; but it is possible that some disbelievers are excluded from this general statement if they are specifically mentioned in a revealed text.... Some of the theologians understood from this hadith that a disbeliever’s punishment is for both his disbelief and his disobedience. It follows, then, that it is permissible for Allah to forgo the punishment of disbelievers on account of some of their disobedience—and that is to bring joy to the heart of the intercessor. It is not a reward to the disbeliever, for his good deeds turned into scattered dust when he died upon disbelief. Muslim narrated from Anas: ‘As for the disbeliever, he shall receive the [reward for] his good deeds in this world, until, when he reaches the Hereafter, he is left without a single good deed.’”

Al-Qurṭubī said in *al-Mufhim*, “There is a disagreement about this particular intercession. Is it verbal [*lisān qawlī*] or metaphorical

[*lisān al-hāl*] in nature? If it is the former then it is problematic in light of the Quranic verse. The answer to this enigma lies in the fact that qualification [*takhsīṣ*] is permissible. On the other hand, if the nature of this intercession is metaphorical, then the hadith means that Abū Ṭālib was rewarded by receiving a lightened punishment because of the great lengths he went to honor and defend the Prophet ﷺ, and that, in turn, was called an intercession because the Prophet ﷺ was the means for the lightening.... Another possible answer is that since the recipient of this lightening does not perceive the lightening, it is as if he wasn't benefited by it [i.e. the intercession]. This is supported by the hadith mentioned earlier which states that he will believe that no one else is receiving a torment worse than his. That is because not even the mountains can bear a minute amount of Hell's torment, and since the one subject to torment is preoccupied with his torment, it can be said he didn't benefit from the lightening of punishment."

This might be supported by the hadith of Umm Ḥabība mentioned earlier in the Book of Marriage from the story of Bint Umm Salama, [stating]: "Thuwayba suckled us both." 'Urwa said, "When Abū Lahab died he was seen in a dream vision and was asked about what he received. He said, 'I have not found any good after you save that I am given drink due to having set Thuwayba free, and on every Monday my punishment is lightened.'" This has already been addressed in that section. In *al-Tadhkira*, al-Qurṭubī considered the likelihood of a disbeliever being presented before the Scale to have his deeds weighed, and he opined that if the scale-pan of bad deeds outweighs the scale-pan of good deeds then his good deeds will be obliterated and he will enter the Fire. However, the disbelievers vary with regard to this. Those of them who have good deeds, such as the manumission of slaves and succor offered to Muslims, are unlike those who don't. So it is conceivable that the lightening of such a person's punishment will be commensurate with the deeds he performed, and that is due to

the statement of the Most High, ﴿We shall erect the Scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection and no soul shall be wronged﴾ [21:47].

This theoretical research seems to contradict the statement of the Most High, ﴿And its punishment shall not be lightened for them﴾ [2:162], and the hadith of Anas I mentioned earlier. There is the raised [marfu‘] hadith of Ibn Mas‘ūd, reported by Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī, that reads, “The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘No one, whether Muslim or disbeliever, does a good deed except that Allah rewards him for it.’ The Companions asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah! What is the reward of the disbeliever?’ He replied, ‘Wealth, children, good health, and the like.’ Then they asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah! What is his reward in the Hereafter?’ He replied, ‘A punishment lesser than the greater punishment.’ Then he recited the verse, ﴿Cast the people of Pharaoh in the severest punishment﴾ [40:46].” The chain of this hadith is weak, and even if we assume that it is sound, it would be understood to refer to the lightening that occurs in relation to the punishment for disobedience, not the punishment for disbelief.<sup>3</sup>

The erudite scholar al-‘Aynī said:

His [i.e., Abū Lahab’s] statement, “due to having set Thuwayba free,” means due to him manumitting her. The word is ‘atāqa with fatha on the letter ‘ayn. In another narration found in ‘Abdal-Razzāq’s collection he said “itqī,” and some have said that this phrase is one way of saying it. The most correct way is to say “i‘tāqi” [“my freeing”], because it means that he freed her from the bonds of slavery.

This statement of al-‘Aynī was taken from al-Kirmānī who said, “If you say that the meaning of this phrase is that he freed her from the bonds of slavery, I maintain that the correct way of saying that is ‘i‘tāqi.’”

I say: Neither author was precise in his words, for ‘itq, ‘atāqa, and ‘atāq are all verbal nouns [maṣdar] of the verb ‘ataqa, as in, “So-and-so ‘ataqa [“freed”] the slave.” Al-‘Aynī’s comment that

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 11:363–364.

one way to word the phrase is with “*‘itqī*” is flawed, because *‘itq* and *‘atāqa* are synonymous, so how can one be more correct in meaning than the other? Furthermore, the statement that “the most correct way is to say “*itāqī*,” because it means that he freed her from the bonds of slavery” betrays a lack of familiarity with the language of the Arabs. The author of *al-Mughrib* stated, “*Itq* is to leave slavehood and to be freed from the bonds of slavery. The word *‘itq* can sometimes take the place of the word *i‘tāq*, which is the verbal noun of *a‘taqā* in the phrase ‘A‘taqahu *mawlāhu*’ [“He was freed by his master”].”

In *al-Tawdīh* it states:

One of the aspects of jurisprudence contained in this hadith is the fact that a disbeliever may receive a recompense for his good deeds that were performed for the people of faith in Allah—as happened with Abū Tālib. However, the difference between Abū Tālib and Abū Lahab in this regard is that Abū Lahab’s lightening will be less, because of Abū Tālib’s support for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, contrasted with Abū Lahab’s enmity toward him.

Ibn Baṭṭāl said:

The sacred hadith [*hadīth qudsī*], “My mercy precedes My wrath,” is soundly interpreted by those who say that Allah’s mercy is not cut off from those who are in the Hellfire eternally. That is because it is completely within Allah’s power to create a punishment for the denizens of Hell that is a mercy and ease for them when compared to the punishment [suffered by others]. The position of the verifying scholars [*muhaqqiqūn*] is that a disbeliever’s punishment is not eased on account of the good deeds he performed in this world; rather, he receives his recompense in this world. Qādī ‘Iyād said, “It is agreed upon by consensus that the disbelievers will not benefit from their good actions or receive their rewards by way of delight or lightening of punishment—even if some of them shall receive more punishment than others.”

Al-Kirmānī said:

Righteous deeds will not benefit a disbeliever and dream visions do not constitute proofs. And assuming that we accept this, there remains the possibility that the righteous deeds in question are the actions that are linked specifically to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, just as Abū Ṭālib will benefit by receiving a lightened punishment. Al-Suhaylī mentioned that al-‘Abbās ﷺ said, “I once saw Abū Lahab in a dream after his death and I inquired about his state. He replied, ‘I have not found any good after you save that I am given drink due to having set Thuwayba free, and on every Monday my punishment is lightened.’” That is because the Prophet ﷺ was born on a Monday and when Thuwayba brought Abū Lahab the good news [of his birth] he freed her. It is said that ‘Urwa’s report, “When Abū Lahab died some of his family beheld him in a dream vision and asked him about what he received,” is *mursal*, since he did not mention who narrated it to him. Even if we assume that it is *mawṣūl* [i.e. with a fully connected chain], still, this report is about a dream, so it is not a proof. It is also likely that the one who saw the dream wasn’t a Muslim at the time, so it cannot be used as proof. It is also reported that this report, even if it is accepted, might be specific to things linked to the Prophet, as is proven in the story of Abū Ṭālib whose punishment was lightened and who was moved from a deep portion of the Fire to a shallower portion. Al-Qurṭubī said, “This lightening is specific to him and those who are explicitly mentioned in the revealed texts. And Allah knows best.”

[Al-Qaṣṭalānī said in] *al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya*:

The Prophet ﷺ was suckled by Thuwayba, the freed slave of Abū Lahab. He freed her after she delivered to him the good news of the Prophet’s birth ﷺ. Abū Lahab was seen in a dream vision after his death and he was asked about his condition. He replied, “I am in the Fire; however, my punishment is lightened every Monday

evening, and I am able to drink water from these fingertips [and he pointed to the tips of his index and middle finger]—and this is because I freed Thuwayba when she brought me the good news of the Prophet’s birth and thus she was able to suckle him.”

Ibn al-Jazarī<sup>4</sup> said:

If this is Abū Lahab, the disbeliever condemned in the Quran, and yet he is rewarded in the Fire because of the joy he felt on the night of the Prophet’s birth ﷺ, what say you about the Muslim believer in divine unity who is of the Prophet’s *Ummā* and who feels happiness during the occasion of his birth and spends what he can in celebration of his love for him ﷺ? Certainly his reward from Allah Most Generous is that He bestows upon him of His vast bounty and allows him to enter the Paradise of Delight!<sup>5</sup>

Under the heading of the hadith, “She brought me the good news of the Prophet’s birth and thus she was able to suckle him,” the commentator on *al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya*, al-Zurqānī, said:

This is not contradicted by the statement of the Most High, ﴿And we bring them to what they did and they find it as scattered dust particles﴾, because it did not ultimately save them from the Fire and enable them to enter Paradise, so it is as if it did not benefit them at all, as al-Bayhaqī pointed out.

It could also be said that the scattering of their deeds will occur after the resurrection, and this narration speaks of what occurs before that. Al-Suhaylī remarked, “This benefit is only a decrease in punishment, for otherwise there is no disagreement that the deeds of the disbelievers are all null and void.” Al-Ḥāfiẓ [Ibn Ḥajar] argued that since the disbelievers are also held

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad al-Zurqānī said of Ibn al-Jazarī, “He is Abū al-Khayr Shams al-Dīn b. al-Jazarī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Dimashqī, the Imam of the variant readings of the Quran, the hadith master, and the author of many works, such as the unrivaled *al-Nashr fi al-qirā’at al-‘ashar*. He was born in 751 AH and died in 833 AH.

<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Jazarī, *‘Arf al-ta‘rif bi al-mawlid al-sharīf*, p. 22.

responsible for the branches of the law [*mukhāṭabūn bi al-furū'*], sins that are less than disbelief may be lightened on account of good deeds they performed. The author of *al-Tawṣīḥ* stated that this was specifically for Abū Lahab on the grounds that it was in honor of the Prophet ﷺ, just as the punishment was lightened for Abū Ṭālib because of the Prophet ﷺ. It has also been stated that there is nothing to preclude lightening the punishment of every disbeliever who performed good works.... May Allah reward the noble hadith master Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Nāṣir, who said:

*If this disbeliever who was condemned  
And whose hands were bound forever in the Fire  
Mentioned that every Monday  
His punishment is lightened due to his joy in Ahmād  
What say you of the servant  
Whose entire life is joyful with Ahmād  
And who dies with belief in divine unity?*<sup>6</sup>

The position of the objector and those who support him is not unprecedented. They do follow some reports from the pious predecessors, but we are not bound to the conclusions they have drawn from them. This is clear if we consider the statement of Imam Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (and al-‘Aynī, too). He was not satisfied with this view, and that is why he said “It is retorted,” followed by a counter-reply and support for al-Bayhaqī’s statement, among others. This plainly shows that Ibn Ḥajar preferred the view of al-Bayhaqī and the others, because he used their quotes as proof; and as the people of learning know, seeking recourse in legal rationale is a proof of interpretation.

Since Ibn Ḥajar quoted Imam Qādī ‘Iyād’s opinion that “it is agreed upon by way of consensus,” and also quoted the statements of those with whom the objector agrees, it behooves me to cite a separate passage from Qādī ‘Iyād that contradicts his claim. In

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<sup>6</sup> Muḥammad al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya*, p. 147.

Ikmāl [al-mu‘lim] Qādī ‘Iyād said just before his aforementioned quote:

There is the statement, “Did we benefit him with anything?” and the statement in another hadith, “Perhaps my intercession shall benefit him on the Day of Judgment”—but Allah Most High said about the disbelievers, ﴿The intercession of the intercessors will not benefit them﴾ and ﴿It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to seek forgiveness for the idolaters, even if they are their close kin﴾ [9:113]. In reply to this, there is no definitive text stating that the Prophet ﷺ interceded for him; he simply informed that his [i.e. Abū Tālib’s] kinship and support benefited him, just as Abū Lahab was provided drink for having freed Thuwayba, the Prophet’s wet-nurse ﷺ. That was a blessing from the Prophet ﷺ which poured upon them and caused their punishment to be lightened. These incidents were the cause of the intercession, not the Prophet’s longing and entreaty ﷺ.<sup>7</sup>

Let every intelligent person take note of what the objector and his supporters did. They quoted a text that they thought substantiated their view, but ignored a text that didn’t. Moreover, al-Qurṭubī replied in a manner similar to Qādī ‘Iyād and added more detail. He said:

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Perhaps my intercession shall benefit him.” What the Prophet ﷺ hoped for in this hadith actually occurred, for the Prophet ﷺ said, “I found him in the deepest flames and moved him to the shallowest flames.” So it appears that he hoped for that and was thus granted it, and then informed others. The question is: is this intercession literal or metaphorical? There is a difference of opinion concerning this. If we concede that it is literal and that the Prophet ﷺ interceded for Abū Tālib through supplication and hopeful entreaty, that is contradicted by the statements of the Most High, ﴿The intercession of the intercessors will not avail them﴾ [74:48], ﴿They will not intercede save for those with

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<sup>7</sup> Qādī ‘Iyād, Ikmāl al-mu‘lim, 1:138.

*whom He is pleased* ﴿ [21:28], and other verses of similar import. The response to this objection is from numerous angles. The most approximate response is that the negated intercession is only the specific intercession [*al-shafā'a al-khāṣa*], which is the intercession that delivers one from chastisement. The most that can be said regarding the apparent contradiction is that one is specific and the other general; hence there is no real contradiction between the two, because it is possible to reconcile between them.

If we concede that the intercession in this hadith is metaphorical, it will mean, as we mentioned elsewhere, that Abū Ṭālib's honor and defense of the Prophet ﷺ were the means of lightening the punishment he deserved, because of his rejection of faith after gaining intimate knowledge of the Prophet's truthfulness ﷺ. So since that lightening was due to the Prophet's existence and blessings ﷺ, the Prophet ascribed it to himself. In this context and meaning it is not farfetched to call this an intercession. In fact, the poets have used the word "intercession" with this meaning. One of them said:

*With his countenance there is an intercessor that effaces misdeeds  
To hearts he is distinguished when he intercedes<sup>8</sup>*

Of course this does not adequately counter the position that the hadith contradicts the Quranic verses about intercession, so the most that can be said is that it is qualified—so let us be sufficed with the earlier answer. Nonetheless, there is no escaping the fact that this is specific and unique for the Prophet ﷺ, and that his intercession is both literal and metaphorical, so the difference here is merely one of semantics.

On the basis of al-Qurṭubī's position it is possible to ascribe to the Prophet ﷺ an intercession that implies the lightening of punishment for those specifically mentioned in the revealed texts, such as Abū Ṭālib. His punishment on account of *sins* was lightened, not the punishment on account of *disbelief*. We

<sup>8</sup> Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Qurṭubī, *al-Tadhkira*, 1:357.

see that when Imam al-Nawawī—may Allah have mercy upon him—comments on the hadith reports about the lightening of Abū Ṭālib’s punishment, he introduces them with section titles such as, “Section: The Prophet’s Intercession for Lightening His Uncle’s Punishment”. This supports and applies equally to the narration about Abū Lahab and adds further strength to and acceptance of the hadith of ‘Urwa.

It is also possible to subsume the hadiths about Abū Ṭālib and Abū Lahab under the hadiths concerning the general respite that the people—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—will enjoy after the terror of the standing on the Last Day. This respite will be because of the Prophet’s intercession ﷺ, for he has many forms of intercession, and the first and the least of them is this form.

Is this respite anything but a type of lightening that the disbelievers will receive from the torment of the terror of that day? Al-Bājūrī stated in his commentary on the *Burda*:

The Prophet ﷺ has many types of intercession. There is his intercession for the cessation of the reckoning, when the terror will be so great that the people will beg to escape the judgment plain, even if it means entering the Fire. This is called the Greater Intercession [al-shafā‘a al-‘uzmā], and it is also called the Praiseworthy Station [al-maqām al-mahmūd], because at that station the Prophet ﷺ will be praised by everyone, the first and the last. This intercession is specific for the Prophet ﷺ. Another type of intercession is the Prophet’s intercession for a group to enter Paradise without reckoning. They will arise from their graves and enter straight away into their palaces. This intercession is also specifically for the Prophet ﷺ..... Another type of intercession is the Prophet’s intercession for lightening the punishment of specific disbelievers, such as his uncle Abū Ṭālib. This intercession for lightening the punishment of certain disbelievers does not contradict Allah’s words ﴿He will not lighten﴾ [2:162], because this verse only

negates the lightening of punishment for disbelief: it does not negate the lightening of punishment for that which is not disbelief.<sup>9</sup>

If you contemplate, dear reader, and ponder the quote above, you will realize that the various types of intercession granted to the Prophet are explained [*bayān*] by him ﷺ and are a qualification [*takhsīṣ*] of the general texts that speak of divine threats [*wa‘īd*]. So by Allah’s permission the Prophet ﷺ can exclude whom he wills—and with what he wills—from the general threat. There are numerous examples of this, most of which have been compiled by our grandfather, the valiant Imam and Sheikh of Islam and the Muslims, Imam Aḥmad Rīḍā, in his treatise *al-Amnu wa al-‘ulā li nā‘itī al-Muṣṭafā bi Dāfi‘ al-balā’* (The security and exaltation of those who describe the Chosen One as the One who Repels Calamity). In this treatise he said ﷺ, “Whoever would like may take this essay and call it *Maniya al-labib anna al-tashrī bi yad al-Habib* ﷺ (The longing of the sagacious concerning the fact that legislation is in the hand of the Beloved ﷺ).”

Up to this point we have presented examples of the Prophet ﷺ lightening the punishment of disobedience for disbelievers. We explained that this lightening was for some of their acts of disobedience and not their disbelief. We also detailed with examples, how the meanings of the Quran are subject to the Prophet’s ﷺ explication [*bayān*]. Let us now dwell for a moment on the specific intercession mentioned by al-Bājūrī: the Prophet’s intercession for a group to enter Paradise without reckoning in which they will arise from their graves and enter their palaces.

Imam al-Bukhārī said, “Ishāq narrated to me via Rawḥ b. ‘Ubāda from Shu‘ba who said, ‘I heard Ḥuṣayn b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān say, ‘I was once sitting with Sa‘id b. Jubayr, who reported from Ibn ‘Abbās that the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Seventy thousand people from my Umma shall enter Paradise without reckoning. They are those who do not seek incantation [*rugya*] from others, or search out for

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<sup>9</sup> Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī, *Sharh al-burda*, p. 23.

omens, and they put their trust completely upon their Lord.”””<sup>10</sup>  
As you can see from this hadith, these individuals are set apart  
from the rest of humanity to whom Allah says: ﴿If you manifest what  
is in yourselves or conceal it, Allah shall take you to account for it﴾ [2:284].

I say to those who support the objector’s claims that the hadith of ‘Urwa is a lie because of it “contradicting the Quran”, Will you now claim that this hadith is a lie, too, or will you attempt to reconcile between it and the verse? Your answer to this is our answer to that!

And while we’re on the topic of textual conflict and reconciliation, I should mention two hadith reports that seem to contradict the belief that the divine preordainment is not altered. In the first hadith, reported by Abū al-Shaykh in *Kitāb al-thawāb* from Anas b. Mālik ﷺ, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Be frequent in your supplications, for supplications alter the absolute preordainment.” In the second hadith, reported by al-Daylāmī in *Musnad al-firdaws* from Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī ﷺ, and by Ibn ‘Asākir Numayr b. Aws al-Ash‘arī in *mursal* form, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Supplication is one of the conscripted soldiers of Allah and it alters the preordainment after it is determined.”<sup>11</sup> Al-Munāwī commented on this hadith in *Fayd al-Qadīr*:

The “absolute preordainment” [*al-qadā’ al-mubram*] mentioned in the hadith ... refers to the preordainment established in the Tablet of Expunction [*Lawḥ al-Mahw*] or the books of the angels, since it accepts increase, while the pre-eternal knowledge [*al-ilm al-azalī*] does not change or diminish. Al-Qādī said, “Preordainment [*qadā’*] is the pre-eternal will that determines a specific order for the created beings. Decree [*qadr*] is the temporal linkage of those things to the divine will.” To have [*ibrām*] with something is to master it [*iḥkām*]. [al-Jawharī] said in *al-Ṣihāḥ*: “It is said that so-and-so *abra*ma something if he mastered it.” Al-Zamakhsharī said,

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<sup>10</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, p. 1377 §4372.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad, *al-Musnad* §154.

"An example of figurative speech is the statement, 'So-and-so abrama something,' or 'The matter is *mubram*.'"

This hadith was reported by Abū al-Shaykh from Anas, and its chain contains 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Majīd. Al-Dhahabī included him among the weak narrators and said, "Ibn Ma'īn said, 'He is nothing.'" Anyhow, he marked the hadith indicating that it was reported by the two Sheikhs [al-Bukhārī and Muslim]. The author erred when he ascribed it to Abū al-Shaykh exclusively, because it is also found in the collections of some of the recognized Sheikhs, such as al-Khaṭīb in *Tārīkh [Baghdād]* who reported it with the wording from al-Mazbūr, from Anas.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Munāwī's explanation that the word *mubram* "refers to the preordainment that is established in the Tablet of Expunction [*Lawḥ al-Mahw*] or the books of the angels," and that "it does not refer to the pre-eternal knowledge, for it does not decrease" refers to a specific type of preordainment that has been called *mubram*, because it resembles it and is absolute insofar as it is contained in the Tablet of Expunction or the books of the angels; hence it is thought to be *mubram* even though it is conditional [*mu'allaq*] in the divine knowledge. This matter has been thoroughly investigated and explained by our grandfather, Imam Aḥmad Rīḍā—may Allah sanctify his secret. He said:

The realization of this issue has come to me via inspiration from the All-Knowing King. The divine legislative rulings are two types. The first type, which includes most rulings, is absolute and free of restriction to a particular time, and the second type is restricted to a particular time. An example of this second type is found in Allah's words: ﴿So if they testify then keep them in their homes until death overtakes them or Allah makes a way for them﴾ [4:15]. After the prescribed punishment for adultery was revealed, the Prophet ﷺ said, "Take this from me: Allah has made a way for them...." This was reported by Muslim and others from 'Ubāda ﷺ. With regard to Allah's knowledge of

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<sup>12</sup> 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī, *Fayd al-Qadīr*, 2:83.

it, the “absolute” [*muṭlaq*] is considered either lasting or qualified. The former is subject to abrogation [*naskh*], and that explains why some people think that an abrogated ruling is replaced [*tabaddal*], because the apparent context of the *muṭlaq* is that it is lasting. This has caused some people to think that abrogation is the lifting of a ruling, whereas our view and the view of the investigating scholars is that abrogation simply details the duration of a certain ruling.

The same may be said regarding ordainments, such as when the Angel of Death ﷺ is instructed, “Seize the soul of So-and-so at such-and-such time, unless that person prays [for a lengthening]”; and then there are ordainments that are absolute and inevitable in the knowledge of Allah Most High, and they are *mubram*. The preordainment that is ostensibly averted through supplication—called the conditional [*mu‘allaq*] preordainment—resembles the absolute preordainment because it appears absolute in the eyes of the creation. The reason that it appears absolute in their eyes is because there is no indication of it being restricted, although it is conditional in reality. The hadith [of Anas ﷺ reported by Abū al-Shaykh] speaks of this latter type of preordainment.

As for the absolute preordainment, there is none who can avert it and there is none who can prevent Allah’s judgment. If that were possible it would necessitate ignorance [i.e., that Allah is qualified with ignorance and does not know that someone will prevent the fulfillment of His will], and Allah Most High is far exalted beyond that.<sup>13</sup>

This is what it means to be cautious and follow the methodology of those who preserve the proofs. Scholars of this caliber seek plausible interpretations in order to prevent the clash of mutual contradiction [*ta‘āruḍ*] in the revealed texts. They are not wont to reject a hadith merely because of the weakness of its chain or a narrator’s questionable probity; rather, they strive to reconcile

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<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Ridā Khān, *al-Mustanad al-mu‘tamad*, p. 54.

the reports and make them fit together seamlessly. And Allah is the source of all success.

These are the scholars we refer to when we seek to understand the meanings of the Quran, for they are the recipients of the knowledge of the *Mujtahid* Imams who received from the Companions, who in turn received directly from the Prophet ﷺ. They have complete insight into the meanings of the Book and the Sunna, and they know the texts that are absolute and restricted and those that are general and qualified.



Allah be praised, this completes the response and lifts the veil of confusion. All that remains is to respond to some of the other claims made by Sheikh Jamīl concerning this topic so the truth can be made clearer and the doubts removed.

Sheikh Jamīl stated: “Who told this person that the scholars accepted the hadith of Abū Lahab, and can he tell us where this supposed hadith is located?” We have already responded to this in detail and mentioned those who accepted the hadith.

Then he said, “What does this person say about the consensus of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a mentioned by Qādī ‘Iyād?” We have already answered the quote of Qādī ‘Iyād; so let us ask: what do you say about those who said otherwise?

Sheikh Jamīl said: “You are interpreting the Quran with your personal opinions.” This accusation does not, however, warrant a response. We leave the matter to the people of fairness and they can be the judge of that. The statements of the Imams exonerate us and are sufficient.

Sheikh Jamīl asked: “Who are the scholars you are talking about?” We say: Imam Ibn Hajar, to name one. You said yourself, Sheikh Jamīl, that he cited the supposed consensus quoted by Qādī ‘Iyād, but we proved that Ibn Hajar didn’t support Qādī ‘Iyād’s position on this.

The Sheikh continued: “Is there anything after the consensus and the verses of the Quran save misguidance?” We say: The claim of consensus is incorrect. Al-Qurṭubī and others adequately discussed the Quranic verses in question. They are the reliable Imams of guidance, so your question applies to them as much as it applies to us. Ask them your questions and say, “Is there anything after the consensus and the verses of the Quran save misguidance?” I won’t bother replying to your lament of “I seek refuge with Allah! Some people are audacious enough to deny the Quran and reject consensus!” for the words of our Imams are sufficient for us, and we take the matter to the Court of the Possessor of Justice and Knowledge.

Sheikh Jamīl continued: “The scholars have responded to the narration about Abū Ṭālib.” Of course they have. Qādī ‘Iyād responded just as they did, and all of them support our position. We have not come across the original sources of your citations, so you are responsible for furnishing them.

Sheikh Jamīl argued: “No one articulated this.” We reply: What do you mean by “this”? What do you mean when you say that this is “fabricated against them”? He continued: “The scholars do not violate consensus or belie the Quran.” Of course they don’t. That hasn’t happened here; the scholars we mentioned have never violated consensus or belied the Quran, and this position is not, as you claim, from the words of ignorant would-be sufis.



This should suffice in responding to the repeated mention of Qādī ‘Iyād’s supposed consensus and what the scholars—Qādī ‘Iyād included—said concerning the easing of Abū Ṭālib’s punishment. Anyone who reads their words will see this clearly.

Sheikh Jamīl mentioned several verses from the Quran that explain how the punishment will not be lightened for the disbelievers. We believe in those verses just as we believe in the

others, and we say, ﴿We believe in them—all of them are from our Lord﴾ [3:7]. We explained our position on these verses and sided with the scholars who gathered between the seemingly contradictory proof-texts and reconciled between them. Sheikh Jamil mentioned other verses that do not speak of easing the punishment as such, but rather speak about how the disbelievers shall abide eternally in the Hellfire and never exit it, such as the verse, ﴿And they will not exit the Fire﴾ [2:167], and ﴿And they will not exit it, and for them is an abiding punishment﴾ [5:37], and others. We agree with Sheikh Jamil on this point and believe that the disbelievers shall abide eternally in the Hellfire, and the punishment for disbelief shall never be lightened or eased. Allah speaks the truth and guides to the straight path.



## CONCLUSION

Those who reject this hadith on the grounds that it goes against the apparent meaning of the Quran might attempt to use Ibn Hajar's words against us. He mentioned the response to the objection against the hadith in a passive formula [*sighat al-tamrīd*], and said, "It is reported that this report is *mursal*...." The opponent is clutching straws here, because according to us—as Hanafis—as well as the majority, *mursal* reports constitute evidence. Al-'Irāqī said in his *Alfiyya*, "Mālik and al-Nu'mān [i.e., Imam Abū Ḥanīfa] used them [i.e., *mursal* reports] as proof, as well as those who followed them, and they followed their religion according to what was contained therein...." Imam al-Sakhawī said in his commentary:<sup>14</sup>

[*Mālik*,] i.e., Mālik b. Anas [used them as proof] according to what is famously reported from him. Likewise Imam Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān b. Thābit [as well as those who followed them,] i.e., those who emulate them [*muqallidūhumā*]. What is meant by the majority here is the majority of the two groups,<sup>15</sup> and even a group from the hadith scholars, as well as Imam Ahmad, according to one narration mentioned by al-Nawawī, Ibn al-Qayyim, Ibn Kathīr, and others. They [followed their religion according to what was contained therein,] that is to say, each of them took what he considered a *mursal* report and acted upon it in legal rulings and other matters. This was mentioned by al-Nawawī in *Sharh al-muhadhdhab* on the

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<sup>14</sup> The original text is contained in the brackets —Tr

<sup>15</sup> In other words, the majority of the Ḥanafī and Mālikī jurists. —Tr

authority of many, if not most, of the jurists. Al-Nawawī said, “And al-Ghazālī reported this as the position of the majority.” Abū Dāwūd said in his treatise, “Most of the early scholars, such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, Mālik, and al-Awzā’ī, used *mursal* reports as legal proofs, until al-Shāfi’ī came along and contested them, followed by Ahmad and others.”<sup>16</sup>

Al-Sakhāwī detailed the position of al-Shāfi’ī and those who followed him, and outlined the conditions for accepting *mursal* reports. It is not within the scope of this essay to go into these details, so I will refer the reader to al-Sakhāwī’s *Fath al-Mughīth*. The gist of what al-Sakhāwī discussed regarding al-Shāfi’ī’s conditions for accepting *mursal* reports was mentioned by al-Munāwī in *al-Yawāqīt wa al-durar sharḥ Nukhbat al-fikr*:

Imam al-Shāfi’ī said: “It [i.e., a *mursal* report] is accepted if it is substantiated by another distinct chain, whether *mursal* or contiguous, because it makes preponderant the possibility that the unnamed narrator was reliable in reality. Similarly, a weak *mursal* report is accepted if it is substantiated by the *mursal* reports of the elders among the Followers [*Tābi’ūn*], and it is suitable to be used when declaring a legal preference [*tarjīh*] on the basis of a Companion’s statement or action, or the opinion of the bulk of scholars [or analogy], or due to its wide-dissemination without any rejection.”<sup>17</sup>

Al-Munāwī mentioned another method used by the hadith scholars. He said:

A group among them, such as Ibn al-Hajib and the author of al-Badī’, held the opinion that the *mursal* reports from the Imams of hadith transmission (like Sa’id b. al-Musayyib and al-Sha’bī) are acceptable because there is no drawback to them. In this case these types of *mursal* reports are judged as contiguous reports [*musnad*].

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<sup>16</sup> Al-Sakhāwī, *Fath al-Mughīth*, 1:152.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Munāwī, *al-Yawāqīt wa al-durar sharḥ Nukhbat al-fikr*, 1:502–503.

A similar approach has been narrated from ‘Isā b. Abān, one of our Hanafi Imams. Abū Bakr al-Rāzī said in *al-Fuṣūl*, “‘Isā b. Abān said, ‘If someone from our time narrates a *mursal* report from the Prophet ﷺ and it has been cited by the people of knowledge, his *mursal* report is carried just as his contiguous report is carried. On the other hand, if someone’s contiguous reports are carried by the people, but not his *mursal* reports, then his *mursal* reports are considered *mawqūf* [“halted”].’”<sup>18</sup> Al-Rāzī continued, “What he means by ‘carried by the people’ is their acceptance of his hadith only, not his audition [*samā‘*], for the audition of the *mursal* and non-*mursal* is allowable.”<sup>19</sup>

‘Isā b. Abān said in his book on ambiguous detailed proofs about this type of *mursal* report, “As far as I see it, a *mursal* report is stronger than a contiguous report.”<sup>20</sup> What he means by *mursal* here are the *mursal* reports from the Imams of transmission. He believes that they are stronger than the contiguous reports of others who are not of their rank.

In light of all of the above, it is clear that the hadith in question is not rejected. How can it be, when it fulfils all of the conditions for acceptance according to the methodology of the investigating scholars [*muhaqqiqūn*] of the Hanafis? The report about Abū Lahab is from ‘Urwa, who was a Follower from the early forebears whose virtue is attested. There are many hadith chains containing ‘Urwa, and they are widespread and not rejected whatsoever. This hadith is acceptable according to the position of the majority and the view of the verifying scholars among the Hanafis and others, like Imam al-Shāfi‘ī. This hadith, therefore, should be considered *mawṣūl*, and should not be rejected on account of it being a “mere dream”. On the contrary, we take delight in this hadith because it substantiates the blessings of the Prophet ﷺ that manifested before and after his birth. These blessings were witnessed and

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<sup>18</sup> Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, *al-Fuṣūl*, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

confirmed by the nomads and city dwellers alike. The books of Prophetic biography [*sīra*] are filled with the sayings of soothsayers who spoke of the Prophet's arrival; so if the hadith scholars and compilers had a problem with these reports because they were "dreams" or "narrations from disbelievers," they would have kept them out of their collections. This answers the objection that "in all likelihood, the narrator was still a non-Muslim at the time of seeing the dream, and as such it can not be used as evidence." Ibn Hajar's statement that "in all likelihood, the narrator was still a non-Muslim at the time of seeing the dream, and as such it can not be used as evidence" is questionable for numerous reasons. Firstly, where did he get the idea that 'Urwa only heard it from the "narrator who was still not a Muslim at the time"? And assuming that 'Urwa only heard it from that narrator, where did Ibn Hajar get the idea that he heard it when the narrator was still a non-Muslim? Why is it inconceivable that 'Urwa heard this hadith after the narrator embraced Islam, or that he heard it from another Companion besides al-'Abbās? Nevertheless, it can be argued that al-'Abbās was narrating the event that influenced his decision to embrace the faith. In the commentary on al-Buṣīrī's *Hamziyya* ode, Ibn Hajar [al-Haytamī] said:

Al-Bayhaqī, al-Khaṭīb, Ibn 'Asākir, and others reported from al-'Abbās ﷺ, who said, "I said to the Prophet ﷺ, 'O Messenger of Allah! A sign of your Prophethood has led me to embrace your faith. I saw you [at birth] whispering to the moon and pointing at it with your finger, after which it began to tilt.' The Prophet ﷺ, said, 'I was speaking to it and it was speaking to me. It was distracting me so I wouldn't cry, and I could hear its sound as it prostrated under the Throne.'"<sup>21</sup>

This report proves that al-'Abbās ﷺ wanted to proclaim his faith but had chosen instead to conceal it until he found the right opportunity to do so. He was powerless at the time and was

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<sup>21</sup> Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī, *Sharḥ al-Hamziyya*, p. 152.

unable to declare his faith until he tricked the disbelievers and marched out with them to the battle of Badr and was subsequently captured by the Muslims. After his capture he openly professed his once secret faith. Al-‘Abbās’ Islam should be dated to the time at which he saw the Prophet ﷺ as a baby, for he said, “A sign of your Prophethood has led me to embrace your faith.” Certainly, Islam has the upper hand and is not dominated.

I have always had this belief about al-‘Abbās and long wished to come across a proof that supported it, until finally I came across this narration. The two Imams, Ibn Ḥajar and al-‘Aynī, said (and the wording here is taken from Ibn Ḥajar):

Ibn Ishāq reported from the hadith of Ibn ‘Abbās: “The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘O ‘Abbās! You are wealthy, so ransom yourself, your two cousins ‘Aqil b. Abī Tālib and Nawfal b. al-Ḥārith, and your ally ‘Utba b. ‘Amr.’ Al-‘Abbās said, ‘I was a Muslim, but these folk put me under duress.’ The Prophet ﷺ replied, ‘Allah knows best regarding what you say. If what you say is true Allah will reward you; however, outwardly you were against us.’”<sup>22</sup>

Ibn al-Jawzī said in *Kashf al-mushkil min hadīth al-Ṣahīhayn* (Disclosure of the enigmatic hadith reports in al-Bukhārī and Muslim):

Al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭallib is the paternal uncle of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He was three years older than the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and embraced Islam early on but concealed his faith. He marched out with the idolaters during the battle of Badr and the Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not kill al-‘Abbās should one of you encounter him, for he has marched out under duress.” Abū al-Yusr captured him, after which he ransomed himself and returned to Mecca shortly before migrating [to Medina].<sup>23</sup>

In short, it is futile for those of us who have not attained the ranks of the skilled hadith critics, or been gifted with their level of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 7:257.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kashf al-mushkil min hadīth al-Ṣahīhayn*, 10:1048.

discernment, to cling to every minute detail in the *mursal* reports. Our only protocol is to accept and rely upon the *mursal* reports and show confidence in the upright Imams of transmission. Imam Ahmād Rīdā—may Allah sanctify his secret—said in *al-Hād al-kāf fī hukm al-di‘āf* (the sufficient guide to the ruling on weak hadith):

Fairness dictates that the non-specialist in hadith criticism should use *mursal* reports as proofs in legal rulings. The non-specialist need only avail himself of the view of the critic, not engage in a “hands on,” self-directed critique; for that is a burden that the non-specialist cannot bear. There is undoubtedly no difference whether the non-specialist mentions or omits the chain of transmission—both are identical. Indeed, the statement of the scrupulous hadith critic that “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said” is just as clear as an explicit or implicit authentication, if not clearer. The potential laxity, positive conjecture, and errors that the hadith specialist makes in citations are just as possible in his hadith authentications—this has been tried and tested. This fact has been explicitly stated by the Imams, such as Ibn al-Salāḥ, al-Ṭabarī, al-Nawawī, al-Zarkashī, al-‘Irāqī, al-‘Asqalānī, al-Sakhāwī, Zakkariyyā al-Anṣārī, al-Suyūtī, and others. They mentioned that one may accept a hadith with confidence and use it as a proof if a reliable Imam authenticates it or reports it in a book that endeavors to maintain a high standard of textual soundness. We mentioned the opinions of the scholars to this effect in our book *Madārij tabaqāt al-hadīth*. We quoted earlier the statement of [‘Alī] al-Qārī from Sheikh al-Islam in point twenty-one, so why is it applicable there but not here?

In any case, this is similar to Imam Ahmād [b. Ḥanbāl] or Yahyā [b. Ma‘īn] saying “this hadith is authentic,” or al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Khuzayma, and Dīyā’ [al-Maqdisī] mentioning a hadith in their rigorously authentic collections [*al-Ṣihāḥ*], not to mention al-Mundhirī’s silence in his *Mukhtaṣar* and the reports of Ibn al-Sakan in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq in *al-Aḥkām*.

Both statements are accepted: those of the aforementioned Imams as well as the statements of the reliable and scrupulous hadith critics who say “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,” and “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ did,” and who report his rulings, states, descriptions of beauty, affairs of grandeur, and qualities of perfection—may Allah Most High send prayers and salutations upon him and bless him, exalt him, ennable him, and honor him, amen!<sup>24</sup>

It is not possible to reject the hadith about Abū Lahab on the basis of it being *mursal*. We are sufficed with what our Imams have pointed out and validated. Al-‘Alā’ī al-Ḥaṣfakī said in *al-Durr al-mukhtār*: “We must follow what they [i.e., our Imams] authenticated and preferred and treat it just as we would if they gave us edicts during their lifetime.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Aḥmad Rīdā Khān, *al-Hād al-kāfi aḥkām al-dīn*, p. 231.

<sup>25</sup> Al-‘Alā’ī al-Ḥaṣfakī, *al-Durr al-mukhtār*, 1:77.



## S U M M A R Y

The findings of this research leave us with twelve points:

- 1 The hadith of ‘Urwa is acceptable, and although *mursal*, it takes the ruling of a *mawṣūl* narration.
- 2 This hadith is accepted and reported by the valiant Imams. Had Imam al-Bukhārī been the only scholar to report this hadith it would suffice as a proof, so what say you when the reliable Imams agreed with his report?
- 3 The contents of ‘Urwa’s hadith are supported and strengthened by the narration that speaks of the lightening of Abū Tālib’s punishment.
- 4 ‘Urwa’s hadith does not conflict with the apparent texts of the Quran, for, as we quoted from al-Qurtubī and others, it is possible to reconcile between them.
- 5 There is nothing to preclude the possibility of punishment being lightened so long as it is not the punishment meted out for disbelief.
- 6 The punishment mentioned in the verse ﴿it will not be lightened﴾ [43:75], which is for the disbelievers, is not unrestricted; rather, it is specific to the punishment meted out for disbelief.
- 7 The source for understanding the meanings of the Quran goes back to the eloquent words of the Prophet ﷺ. People are at varying levels when it comes to this. There are scholars who take from the *Mujtahid* scholars who took from the Compan-

ions who understood the Quran directly from the Prophet's instruction ﷺ, and then there are laymen like us who do not have the privilege to authenticate texts or declare preferences. Our role is to rely on what the Imams have transmitted to us from the Prophet ﷺ and accept what has been given to us by the jurists who had a sound understanding of the meanings of the Quran and Sunna. They conveyed to us their understanding. They are our reference points and we have confidence in their transmissions and rulings. Allah Most High said, ﴿O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority over you﴾ [4:59].

- 8 ‘Urwa’s hadith can be used as a proof and is not diminished by the fact that it reports a dream vision.
- 9 This hadith is likewise not diminished by the claim that “in all likelihood, the narrator was still a non-Muslim at the time of seeing the dream, and as such it can not be used as evidence.” There is an explicit narration from al-‘Abbās proving that he embraced Islam and concealed his faith, so the previously mentioned objection is baseless, and Allah knows best.
- 10 As we quoted from Imam Aḥmad Rīdā in his *al-Mustanad al-mu’tamad*, a ruling might appear absolute although it is actually qualified. This, however, is only apparent to the scholars.
- 11 The Prophet ﷺ has many types of intercession, the least of them being the relief he brings to people at the Judgment Plain, as we mentioned earlier. This type of intercession proves that the disbelievers in general will experience a lightening of the terror experienced on the Day of Standing. Included in this intercession is the Prophet’s intercession for some disbelievers exclusively, as mentioned in the hadith in Muslim’s *Sahīh*. We detailed how these intercessions are qualifications of the general texts.
- 12 You can also apprehend from this that there is an apparent

“mutual-contradiction” [*mu‘āraḍa*] between the proof texts in the Quran and Sunna: some indicate that the disbelievers’ deeds will not avail them any reward in the Hereafter and that their punishment will not be lightened, whereas other proofs indicate that some of them will receive reward for their good deeds and experience a lightened punishment. I bring to mind the words of the Most High, ﴿And we shall set up the scales of justice﴾ [21:47]. Al-Qurtubī mentioned this verse in *al-Tadhkira* as a proof for his “research” that was mentioned by Ibn Ḥajar in *al-Fath*. He sought to prove that the deeds of the disbelievers are weighed in the Scale. The clearest proof for the general weighing of deeds is the verse, ﴿And the weighing on that Day will be a true weighing. So they whose scale will be heavy shall be from the triumphant. And they whose scale will be light are those who lost their own selves for having wronged Our verses﴾ [7:8-9]. As you can see, this verse proves that the deeds of the disbelievers are generally weighed; therefore, we must seek—as best we can—to reconcile and gather these texts together and show qualification [*takhsīṣ*] in order to prevent conflict between them. The way to do this is to believe that ﴿Allah does not forgive that partners are set up along with Him﴾ [4:116], as He revealed in the decisive verse of His Book, and to believe that He can forgive what is less than that through lightening punishment for whomever He wills, for ﴿He forgives less than that for whomever He wills﴾ [4:116].

I also recall the hadith of ‘Abdullāh b. Mas‘ūd, who reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “No one, whether Muslim or disbeliever, does a good deed except that Allah rewards him for it.” The Companions asked, “O Messenger of Allah! What is the reward of the disbeliever?” He replied, “Wealth, children, good health, and the like.” Then they asked, “O Messenger of Allah! What is his reward in the Hereafter?” He replied, “A punishment lesser than the greater punishment.” Then he recited the verse, ﴿Cast the people

*of Pharaoh in the severest punishment* ﴿40:46﴾. After citing this report in *al-Fath*, Ibn Ḥajar said, “The chain of this hadith is weak,” but you should pay no mind to that, because he was speaking about the chain and not the actual text of the hadith. The weakness of the chain does not necessarily imply the weakness of the text, and how could it, when a similar meaning was reported in the story of Abū Ṭālib, and it has numerous routes of transmission. Ibn Ḥajar interpreted the hadith of Abū Ṭālib as referring to the lightening of punishment that is linked with disobedience, and not disbelief. As you can plainly see, Ibn Ḥajar provided the hadith a sound interpretation and corroborated al-Qurṭubī’s view. Looking at Ibn Ḥajar’s words, “as for the sins that are less than disbelief, what is to prevent their punishment being lightened on account of them?” we say that the hadith is established even if its chain has weakness. The chain of transmission should not cause one to abandon a narration so long as its meaning is sound. This is the conclusion that I have drawn from the words of the Imams, and with Allah is all success.

In conclusion, I say to Sayyid Jamīl: O Sayyidī! Don’t be concerned by the ignorance of the speaker; look instead to what is being said. As someone said in the days of old, “Don’t look at the speaker, rather consider what is being said.” May Allah Most High send prayers and salutations upon our master Muhammad, and upon his Companions and family.

—Muhammad Akhtar Rida al-Qadirī al-Azharī



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